CLAIMS

1. A signal processing method in which an input signal is quantized to provide a sequence and the sequence is converted to a code word string by variable-length coding of the sequence, comprising:

a step of replacing one code word of the code word string with some other code word shorter than the one code word and having a value approximate to that of the one code word.

2. The ~~method~~ as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the other code word is a one equal to a code word provided by quantization of the one code word.

3. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the variable-length coding is an entropy coding by which a shorter code is allocated to a sequence whose probability of occurrence is higher.

4. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein the sequence is represented by a pair of a run length (run) being a number of consecutive zeroes included before a non-zero numeral and an amplitude (amp) being the non-zero numeral and the one code word is replaced with some other code word corresponding to a pair in which "amp" is approximate to that in the initial pair.

5. The method as set forth in Claim 1, wherein for pixels of a video signal, forming each input frame, the frame is divided into a plurality of blocks, the block is subjected to discrete cosine transform (DCT), a DCT coefficient of the DCT-transformed block

is quantized based on quantization information, the DCT coefficient having been subjected to the quantization is arranged in a one-dimensional sequence, and then subjected to the variable-length coding.

6. The method as set forth in Claim 6, wherein the code word replacement is effected in the order from the higher-order DCT coefficient to lower-order one in the sequence, and ended when a bit amount provided by the variable-length coding of the sequence is reached.

7. A signal processor in which an input signal is quantized to provide a sequence and the sequence is converted to a code word string by variable-length coding of the sequence, comprising:

means for replacing one code word of the code word string with some other code word shorter than the one code word and having a value approximate to that of the one code word.

8. A The ~~method~~ signal processor as set forth in Claim 7, wherein the other code word is a one equal to a code word provided by quantization of the one code word.

A 9. The ~~method~~ signal processor as set forth in Claim 7, wherein the variable-length coding is an entropy coding by which a shorter code is allocated to a sequence whose probability of occurrence is higher.

A 10. The ~~method~~ signal processor as set forth in Claim 7, wherein the sequence is represented by a pair of a run length (run) being a number of consecutive zeroes included before a non-zero numeral and an amplitude (amp) being the non-zero numeral and the one code

word is replaced with some other code word corresponding to a pair in which "amp" is approximate to that in the initial pair.

11. The ~~method~~ signal processor as set forth in Claim 7, wherein for pixels of a video signal, forming each input frame, the frame is divided into a plurality of blocks, the block is subjected to discrete cosine transform (DCT), a DCT coefficient of the DCT-transformed block is quantized based on quantization information, the DCT coefficient having been subjected to the quantization is arranged in a one-dimensional sequence, and then subjected to the variable-length coding.

12. The ~~method~~ signal processor as set forth in Claim 11, wherein the code word replacement is effected in the order from the higher-order DCT coefficient to lower-order one in the sequence, and ended when a bit amount provided by the variable-length coding of the sequence is reached.